



# U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

## Iceland

### Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2004](#)

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Iceland is a constitutional republic and a parliamentary democracy in which citizens periodically choose their representatives in generally free and fair multiparty elections. Executive authority is vested in the prime minister, who is head of government and is appointed by the President. The President is head of state and is elected by popular vote for a 4-year term. The unicameral Althingi parliament constitutes the legislative branch. In May 2003, voters reelected the Independence and Progressive parties to form a governing coalition led by Prime Minister David Oddsson (Independence). On June 26, Olafur Grimsson was reelected as president. In September, Foreign Minister Halldor Asgrimsson (Progressive) replaced Oddsson based on a coalition agreement. The judiciary is independent.

Civilian authorities maintained effective control of the police forces, which were responsible for internal security. The country had no military forces. There were no reports that security forces committed human rights abuses.

The market economy provided residents with a high standard of living. The population was approximately 290,570; the gross domestic product grew approximately 4 percent during the year. Fish and other marine products accounted for approximately 40 percent of the country's exports; aluminum was the second leading export.

The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens, and the law and judiciary provide effective means of addressing individual instances of abuse. Societal discrimination against minorities and foreigners was a problem. There were isolated reports of women trafficked to the country.

## RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

### Section 1

Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

#### a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports of the arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life committed by the Government or its agents.

#### b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

#### c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The law prohibits such practices, and there were no reports that government officials employed them. In its May 2003 review of the country's report on its implementation of the Convention Against Torture, the U.N. Committee Against Torture (CAT) expressed concern that the law does not clearly define and prohibit torture and does not prohibit the courts' use of evidence obtained through torture; however, the Government responded that its law does prohibit torture. In 2003, the Ministry of Justice disseminated the conclusions of the CAT among relevant ministries and agencies.

Prison conditions generally met international standards, and the Government permitted visits by independent human rights observers. The Ombudsman of Parliament monitored prison conditions.

Little Hraun Prison, a state of the art detention facility, held most of the country's approximately 100 prisoners; however, the prison system also used a substandard jail (Hegningarhusid), where the 16 individual cells lacked toilets and sinks. In most cases, prisoners stayed in Hegningarhusid Prison only a short time for evaluation and processing before moving to another facility.

The Government maintained a separate minimum-security prison for women inmates; however, because so few women were incarcerated, some men who had been convicted of nonviolent crimes were held there as well. Judges could sentence juvenile offenders who were at least 15 years old to prison terms, but they gave the vast majority probation or suspended sentences or sent them to treatment programs. In the rare instances when juvenile offenders were incarcerated, they were held with adults, since there was no separate facility for juveniles. Since the need to incarcerate a juvenile occurred infrequently, the Government argued that separation was not practical; however, human rights observers criticized this practice.

The law allows the Government to hold pretrial detainees with the general prison population. In May 2003, the Government initiated the bidding process for a new detention prison near Reykjavik for completion in 2005. As of December, the project remained in the planning stages, and it appeared the deadline would not be met.

During the year, 86 persons placed in custody spent some time in solitary confinement, on average for 10.7 days. In March 2003, the Ombudsman of Parliament criticized Litla Hraun officials' carelessness and asked the prison authority to take steps to ensure medical treatment for inmates in solitary confinement. He acted on a complaint filed by an inmate in 2002 whose request to see a psychiatrist was ignored. During the year, the prison authority retrained staff on proper procedures for safeguarding prisoner welfare; however, mental health advocates complained that prisoner access to mental health care remained inadequate.

#### d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The Constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the Government generally observed these prohibitions.

The Minister of Justice is the head of the police force. The National Commissioner of Police administers and runs police operations that require centralized coordination among various offices. Various district chiefs of police have responsibility for law enforcement in their areas, investigate criminal offenses, and have prosecution powers.

Police may only make arrests when they strongly suspect someone has committed a crime or when someone refuses to obey police orders to move. Persons placed under arrest are entitled to legal counsel, receive a form for their signature that outlines their rights and options, and within 24 hours of the arrest appear before a judge who rules whether they need to remain in custody during the investigation.

In December 2003, the Reykjavik district court found two Reykjavik police officers guilty of improper arrests and false reports. Both officers lost their jobs, and the court imposed suspended prison sentences of 2 and 5 months; the longer term was given to an officer, who also was found guilty of improper use of chemical spray. In May, the Supreme Court dismissed one of the two charges of improper arrest, acquitted the officer who had been given a 2 month sentence, and reduced the 5 month sentence to 2 months. The police reinstated the acquitted officer.

#### e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution and the law provide for an independent judiciary, and the Government generally respected this provision in practice.

There are two levels of courts: a five-member Judicial Council, which administers the eight district courts, and the Supreme Court. The Minister of Justice appoints members of the Judicial

Council and the Supreme Court; all judges, at all levels, serve for life.

The law provides for the right to a fair trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right. Courts do not use juries, but multi-judge panels are common, particularly in the Supreme Court, which hears all appeals. The courts presume defendants' innocence and generally try them without delay. Defendants receive access to legal counsel of their own choosing. For defendants unable to pay attorneys' fees, the State covers the cost; however, defendants who are found guilty must reimburse the State. Defendants have the right to be present at their trial, to confront witnesses, and to participate in the proceedings. At the discretion of the courts, prosecutors may introduce evidence that police have obtained illegally. With limited exceptions, trials are public and conducted fairly. Defendants have the right to appeal, and the Supreme Court handles appeals expeditiously.

In June, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that police had violated Article 5.1 (right to liberty and security) of the European Convention on Human Rights in the case of a woman arrested six times, from 1988 to 1992, for drunk and disorderly behavior. The court found that, at the time of arrest, the police lacked sufficient legal basis for the woman's detention, but rejected her compensation claim. The court stated that the laws in question were not clear enough to prevent possible cases of arbitrary arrest. The laws are no longer in effect.

There were no reports of political prisoners.

#### f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Constitution prohibits such actions, and the Government generally respected these prohibitions in practice.

The Government has not completed its promised revision of 1998 legislation to establish a national computerized health records database. Following a 2003 Supreme Court ruling that its encryption would be insufficient to protect privacy, the never-completed database remained inactive.

## Section 2

### Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

#### a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice and did not restrict academic freedom. An independent press, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to ensure freedom of speech and of the press.

The independent media were active and expressed a wide variety of views without restriction.

Internet access was almost universally available and unrestricted.

#### b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for freedom of assembly and association, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice.

In June 2003, the Privacy and Data Protection Authority informed the Ministry of Justice that the Ministry had acted unlawfully in issuing lists of Falun Gong members to police and airlines who in turn denied entry to the country to between 110 and 120 Falun Gong practitioners in June 2002. A human rights lawyer asked the Ministry of Justice to issue an official apology to the group and threatened to take legal action if it did not do so. At the lawyer's request, the Ombudsman of the Althingi reviewed the case. In a preliminary finding, the Ombudsman determined that the law permits authorities to bar prospective protesters from entering the country and, alternatively, to make entry contingent on signing agreements to follow police orders. Human rights advocates complained that the Ombudsman's decision set a precedent for unfettered government action whenever the police assert that a group presents a threat to public order. The Ombudsman has yet to respond to complaints that the Government directed its national airline to bar Falun Gong members from boarding planes bound for the country.

#### c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The State financially supported and promoted the official religion, Lutheranism.

The State directly paid the salaries of the 147 ministers in the State Lutheran Church, and these ministers were considered to be public servants under the Ministry of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs; however, the Church was autonomous in its internal affairs. The Government did not pay Lutheran ministers in the nonstate churches, also known as Free Churches.

All citizens 16 years of age and older must pay an annual church tax of approximately \$121 (ISK 7,800). For persons who were not registered as belonging to a religious organization, or who belonged to one that was not registered and officially recognized, the tax payment went to the University of Iceland, a secular institution.

The law specifies conditions and procedures that religious organizations must follow to be registered by the Government. Such recognition was necessary for religious organizations other than the state church to receive a per capita share of church tax funds from the Government. The law applies only to religious organizations that are seeking to be, or are already, officially recognized and registered. The Government did not place any restrictions or requirements on unregistered religious organizations, which had the same rights as other groups in society.

The law mandates religious instruction in Christianity in the public schools; however, students may be exempted from attending the classes. Anti-bias and tolerance education are incorporated in the national curriculum in life skills and sociology courses.

In August, a Jewish visitor reported in an online newsmagazine that he and a friend had been harassed by a group of young teenagers who pointed at his yarmulke, gave a "heil Hitler" salute, and then briefly blocked the visitors' exit from a parking lot and intimidated them. A daily newspaper picked up the story, sparking over 30 online comments from correspondents based in the country. Some of the comments were themselves anti-Semitic or xenophobic in tone and content.

For a more detailed discussion, see the [2004 International Religious Freedom Report](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41686.htm).

## d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The Constitution provides for these rights, and the Government generally respected them in practice.

The law prohibits forced exile, and the Government did not employ it.

The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status in accordance with the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol, and the Government has established a system for providing protection to refugees. The Government cooperated with the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees. In January 2003, the Act on Foreigners took effect that provides guidelines on the granting of asylum and refugee status; the Act provides that only the Directorate of Immigration may deny admission to asylum seekers. The Government did not accept quota refugees during the year.

The Government has not formulated a policy of temporary protection for those persons who fall outside of the definition of the 1951 U.N. Convention Related to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol because this issue has rarely arisen. The Directorate of Immigration and the Icelandic Red Cross reported that 76 persons applied for asylum during the year (compared with 80 in 2003 and 110 in 2002). Of these, 64 were sent to other countries, withdrew their applications, and were denied asylum. At year's end, the applications of 12 persons still were being processed. Most asylum seekers applied for asylum after entering the country, rather than in the international sector of the airport. On February 12, the small municipality of Reykjanesbaer, pursuant to a contract with immigration authorities, took over housing and care of asylum seekers from the Red Cross. Processing of asylum cases may take a year or more, during which time asylum seekers were eligible for state-subsidized health care, could apply for work permits and enroll their children in public schools.

## Section 3

## Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The Constitution provides citizens with the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercised this right in practice through periodic, free, and fair elections held on the basis of universal suffrage. Elections to the Althingi, the unicameral legislature, were held in May 2003.

Center-right coalitions have governed since 1991. There were 19 women in the 63-seat Althingi and 3 women in the 12-member Cabinet. Two of 9 Supreme Court members and 10 of 38 district court judges were women. Foreigners, who have resided in the country legally for 5 years (3 years for Scandinavian citizens), may vote in municipal elections. There were no members of minorities in the legislature.

## Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A number of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were cooperative and responsive to their views. An independent Ombudsman, elected by Parliament, monitors and reports to national and local authorities to ensure equal protection of persons residing in the country, whether citizens or aliens. Individuals may lodge complaints with the Ombudsman regarding decisions, procedures, and conduct of public officials and government agencies. The Ombudsman may demand official reports, documents, and records and may summon officials to give testimony and has access to official premises. While the Ombudsman's conclusions are not binding on authorities, his recommendations generally have been followed. There was also a Children's Ombudsman (see Section 5, Children).

In November, the parliament cut all direct government funding for the Icelandic Human Rights Center, effective at year's end. Funded primarily by the Government, but operated as an NGO, the Center had acted as the country's leading human rights watchdog, vetting government legislation and reporting to international treaty monitoring bodies as well as promoting human rights education and research. Public figures, human rights advocates, and several of the center's European partner institutes argued that having to apply to the executive branch for grants henceforth will undermine the center's independence.

## Section 5

## Discrimination, Societal Abuses and Trafficking in Persons

The Constitution prohibits discrimination based on these factors, but the law does not prohibit discrimination by nongovernmental actors.

## Women

The law prohibits domestic violence and rape, including spousal rape; however, violence against women continued to be a problem,

with gang rapes an ongoing concern. Police statistics indicated that the incidence of violence against women, including rape and

sexual assault, was low; however, the number of women seeking medical and counseling assistance indicated that many incidents went unreported. During the year, up to 88 women sought temporary lodging at the country's women's shelter, mainly because of domestic violence, and the shelter offered counseling to approximately 443 clients. During the year, the sexual violence counseling center in Reykjavik drew 446 clients, including 223 seeking help for the first time.

The Government helped finance various facilities and organizations that provided assistance to victims of violence. The City of Reykjavik, in addition to partially funding such services, provided help to immigrant women in abusive relationships, offering emergency accommodation, counseling, and information on legal rights. Courts could issue restraining orders, but there were complaints that the police were reluctant to recommend them and that the courts granted them only in extreme circumstances. Victims of sexual crimes were entitled to lawyers to advise them of their legal rights and help them pursue cases against the alleged assailants; however, a large majority of victims declined to press charges or chose to forgo trial, in part to avoid unwanted publicity. Some local human rights monitors also attributed underreporting to the fact that convictions are rare due to the heavy burden of proof and traditionally yield light sentences. The maximum penalty for rape is 16 years' imprisonment, but judges typically imposed sentences much closer to the minimum of 1 year.

Prostitution is legal, but it is illegal to engage in prostitution as a main source of income. It is also illegal to act as an intermediary in the sale or procurement of sex.

There were concerns that some foreign women were trafficked to work as exotic dancers or in massage parlors where sexual services are offered (see Section 5, Trafficking).

More than 75 percent of women participated in the labor market. In part, this circumstance reflected the country's comprehensive system of subsidized day care, which made work outside the home more affordable and convenient for parents. The law requires that employers give preference to hiring and promoting men or women in areas where they are underrepresented, so long as they are equal in all other respects to job seekers of the opposite sex. Despite laws that require equal pay for equal work, a pay gap existed between men and women. According to one of the largest labor unions, during the year, women on average earned 15 percent less than men. Some women's rights activists also expressed concern that the proportion of women in the legislature dropped below one-third after elections in May 2003 (see Section 3) and that only 14 percent of the bar and 22 of 147 professors at the national university were women.

Since January 2003, the law permits both mothers and fathers to take 3 months of paid leave upon the birth of a child, with an additional 3 months that parents either could take individually or split between them. Such leave is at 80 percent of the normal salary. The new leave requirements apply equally to the public and private sectors.

The Government funded a Center for Gender Equality to administer the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men. The center also provided gender equality counseling and education to national and municipal authorities, institutions, companies, individuals, and NGOs. The Minister of Social Affairs appoints a Complaints Committee on Equal Status to adjudicate alleged violations of the act; the committee's rulings are nonreviewable. The Minister of Social Affairs also appoints an Equal Status Council, with nine members drawn from national women's organizations, the University of Iceland, and labor and professional groups, which makes recommendations for equalizing the status of men and women in the labor market.

During the year, the Complaints Committee found that there was demonstrable gender bias in the Justice Minister's 2003 appointment of a Supreme Court justice where the minister did not provide an adequate explanation for appointing a man instead of a more qualified woman. The candidate delayed legal action while her application for another Supreme Court seat was under consideration, but, following the appointment in September of another male to the court, declared her intention to sue. At year's end, she had not yet done so.

#### Children

The Government was strongly committed to children's rights and welfare; it funded public education and health care. School attendance is compulsory through the age of 15 and free through public university level. Approximately 85 percent of students continued to upper secondary education. The Government provided free prenatal and infant medical care, as well as heavily subsidized childcare. The Children's Ombudsman, who is appointed by the Prime Minister but is independent from the Government, fulfilled a mandate to protect children's rights, interests, and welfare by, among other things, exerting influence on legislation, government decisions, and public attitudes. When investigating complaints, the Ombudsman had access to all public and private institutions and associations that house children or otherwise care for them; however, the Ombudsman's conclusions were not legally binding on parties to disputes.

There were some reports of abuse of children, although there was no societal pattern of child abuse. The government-funded Agency for Child Protection operated eight treatment centers and a diagnostic facility for abused and troubled minors. It also coordinated the work of approximately 34 committees throughout the country that were responsible for managing child protection issues (for example, foster care) in their local areas. Beginning in 2002, the local committees hired professionals knowledgeable about sexual abuse. One committee could not, due to its remote location, hire a specialist on sexual abuse and had to rely on temporary hires on a case-by-case basis instead.

In an effort to accelerate prosecution of child sexual abuse cases and lessen trauma to the child, the Government maintained a

Children's Assessment Center (Barnahus). The center, which handled approximately 199 child abuse cases during the year, was intended to create a safe and secure environment where child victims might feel more comfortable talking about what happened to them. It brought together police, prosecutors, judges, doctors, and officials from child protection services. District Court judges did not have to use the center and could hold investigatory interviews in the courthouse instead, a practice that concerned some children's rights advocates.

#### Trafficking in Persons

The law prohibits trafficking in persons; however, there were anecdotal reports that women were trafficked for exploitation.

The general penal code states that "whoever is found guilty of trafficking in persons with the aim of sexual abuse, or forced labor, or for organ removal shall be punished by up to 8 years imprisonment." Criminal procedures provide that victims may testify against traffickers at government expense. During the year, police did not charge any persons with trafficking, although traffickers have been convicted under the law on alien smuggling.

The law provides that a person may be extradited as long as the offense involved would be punishable by more than 1 year's imprisonment; therefore, the law would allow the extradition of persons who were charged with trafficking in other countries.

Police, airport authorities, and women's aid groups reported that there was anecdotal evidence of foreign women trafficked to the country, primarily to work in striptease clubs or massage parlors offering sexual services. The Baltic countries were the main region of origin for women working in such clubs and parlors, with others coming from Central and Eastern Europe and Russia. There were no statistics on the number or origin of women actually trafficked. To work as an exotic dancer, any person from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) must first obtain a work permit, which is typically valid for 3 months. In 2002, the number of foreign dancers applying for work permits dropped sharply after Reykjavik authorities prohibited private dances that served as a front for prostitution. The Supreme Court upheld the ban in 2003, and other municipalities have since enacted their own bans, thus largely destroying the profit incentive for trafficking women into the country. Social workers suspect that most foreign women working in this field now come from within the EEA and are thus impossible to track through work permit applications.

Trafficking victims could seek help at the women's shelter, counseling center, and hospital, all of which receive government funding. There were no domestic NGOs dedicated solely to assisting victims of trafficking, nor was there an established government assistance program. Some NGOs provided government supported counseling and shelter to women and children who were victims of violence or sexual abuse. The government-funded Icelandic Human Rights Center was also available to assist with trafficking cases and make referrals.

The Government participates in the Nordic-Baltic Action Group Against Human Trafficking, which hosts periodic meetings to discuss programs and strategies. The group, established to succeed the Nordic-Baltic Campaign Against Trafficking, has a mandate that runs until August 2006.

#### Persons with Disabilities

There was no official discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment, education, or the provision of other state services. The law provides that such persons have the right to all common national and municipal services and to receive assistance to live and work normally in society. The law also provides that persons with disabilities receive preference for a government job when they are at least as qualified as other applicants; however, advocates asserted that common practice and implementation of the law fell short of full protection of the rights of persons with disabilities to the extent that persons with disabilities have come to constitute a majority of the country's poor.

Building regulations require that public accommodations and government buildings, including elevators, be accessible to persons in wheelchairs; that public property managers reserve 1 percent of parking spaces (a minimum of one space) for persons with disabilities; and that, to the extent possible, sidewalks outside the main entrance of such buildings be kept clear of ice and snow. Violations of these regulations are punishable by a fine or a jail sentence of up to 2 years; however, the main association for persons with disabilities complained that this regulation was not enforced regularly, and authorities rarely assessed penalties for noncompliance.

Some mental health advocates criticized the Government for not devoting sufficient attention and resources to the care of persons with mental disabilities. Although the law safeguards their rights, a large number of persons with mental disabilities remained on waiting lists for housing, education, and employment programs. Advocates for the mentally ill alleged that government funding for the care of the mentally ill was generally inadequate and that the government-financed health system funded too few hospital places for acute patients and thus exacerbated a shortage of publicly funded preventative and follow-up mental health care.

#### National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

While the population remained largely homogeneous, family- and employment-sponsored immigrants were more visible.

In May, the parliament amended the 2002 Act on Foreigners in order to eliminate perceived loopholes in the immigration system and combat phony or arranged marriages. The amendments stipulate that in order to win automatic residence rights, a foreign spouse has to be at least 24 years old. Further, the amendments give authorities the power to conduct house searches without a prior court order, as well as DNA testing, in cases where they suspect immigration fraud. Human rights and immigrants' advocates criticized the amendments, arguing that it is discriminatory effectively to demand a higher marriage age of foreigners than of citizens, who can marry at age 18. They also complained that the house searches and DNA tests being contemplated violated privacy rights.

The term "newcomer" has taken on a negative connotation and was increasingly applied to immigrants of color. Asian women in public at night reportedly were sometimes taunted on the assumption that they were prostitutes and minority children were teased for allegedly having been "purchased on the Internet."

The Icelandic Red Cross operated an Intercultural Center in Reykjavik to help foreigners adjust to living in the country. The center offered free translation, education, research, and advice services. The Ministry of Social Affairs operated a Multicultural Center in Isafjordur that facilitated the interaction of citizens with foreign nationals and provided support services for foreign nationals in rural municipalities. However, the Isafjordur center's remote West Fjords location meant that it could serve only the immigrant community in that region.

In June, the publishers of a Reykjavik monthly newspaper recounted how a private dance company refused to rent them a national costume (for a planned cover shoot intended to depict the future of the country) because the model was black. The company's spokesman offered the explanation that his organization had objected to the newspaper's proposed theme because, if anything, the country's future of Iceland was yellow rather than black. The public reaction was overwhelmingly critical of the dance company, and the Bishop of Iceland referred to the matter in a speech before the Althingi urging tolerance.

The Government said it was reviewing the recommendations of a 2003 report by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance that concluded that conditions for immigrants "may not be wholly satisfactory."

## Section 6 Worker Rights

### a. The Right of Association

The Constitution provides for the right of workers to establish unions, draw up their own constitutions and rules, choose their own leaders and policies, and publicize their views; and workers exercised these rights. Labor unions were independent of the Government and political parties. Approximately 85 percent of all eligible workers belonged to unions.

### b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The law allows unions to conduct their activities without interference, and the Government protected this right in practice. The law requires employers to withhold union dues (1 percent of gross pay) from the pay of all employees, whether or not they are union members, to help support disability, strike, and pension funds, and other benefits to which all workers are entitled.

Trade unions and management organizations periodically negotiate collective bargaining agreements that set specific terms for workers' pay, hours, and other conditions. With limited exceptions, collective bargaining is done on an industry- or sector-wide basis. These agreements, not the law, set the minimum labor standards for most workers. The Government played a minor role in the bargaining process, providing mediation assistance in a few cases through the State Mediator's Office.

At its annual June labor conference, the International Labor Organization (ILO) upheld a 2003 ILO Freedom of Association Committee finding that the Government had, in the course of a 2001 fishing industry strike, infringed on the principle of free and voluntary collective bargaining and recommended that the country review its practices concerning labor disputes.

With the exception of limited categories of workers in the public sector whose services are essential to public health or safety, unions have the right to strike.

There are no export processing zones.

### c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits forced or compulsory labor, including by children, and there were no reports that such practices occurred.

### d. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law prohibits the employment of children younger than age 16 in factories, on ships, or in other places that are hazardous or require hard labor; this prohibition was observed in practice. Children 14- or 15-years old may be employed part-time or during school vacations in light, nonhazardous occupations. Their work hours must not exceed the ordinary work hours of adults in the

same occupation. The Administration of Occupational Safety and Health enforced child labor regulations effectively.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The law does not establish a minimum wage, but the minimum wages negotiated in various collectively bargained agreements applied automatically to all employees in those occupations, whether they were union members or not. While the agreements can be either industry- or sector-wide, and in some cases firm-specific, the minimum wage levels are occupation-specific. Labor contracts provided a decent standard of living for a worker and family.

The standard legal workweek was 40 hours, which included nearly 3 hours of paid breaks a week. Work exceeding 8 hours in a workday must be compensated as overtime. Workers were entitled to 11 hours of rest within each 24-hour period and to a day off every week. Under defined special circumstances, employers may reduce the 11-hour rest period to no less than 8 hours, but they then must compensate workers with 1.5 hours of rest for every hour of reduction. They may also postpone a worker's day off by 1 week.

The legislature set health and safety standards, and the Ministry of Social Affairs administered and enforced them through its Administration of Occupational Safety and Health, which could close workplaces until they met safety and health standards. Workers had a collective, but not individual, right to refuse to work in a place that did not meet occupational safety and health criteria. It is illegal to fire workers who report unsafe or unhealthy conditions.

In 2003, union representatives and media reported that Italian contractor Impregilo failed to pay adequate wages or provide proper accommodation and facilities to several hundred foreign workers on a major government-financed hydroelectric dam construction project. The company hired workers through Portuguese employment agencies that created multiple versions of contracts to mislead both employees and regulators. The unions ultimately concluded an agreement with Impregilo guaranteeing them access to wage information. A number of cases of alleged violations of workers' rights remained under union review, but no legal action has been taken.